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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PULLMAN STRIKE.

THE railway strike of 1894 occupies a very exceptional place among industrial disturbances in the United States. The violence which attended the strike, the threats of a general uprising by the whole class of wage-workers, the minor strikes actually undertaken in accordance with this idea by a few organizations not concerned in the Pullman dispute—these startling events gave rise during the strike to a fear that the city of Chicago might become involved in general riot, and to a feeling, when immediate danger had passed, that descent into anarchy must indeed threaten a society in which such disorder could take place. The possible failure of the American experiment in self-government was now thought by observers in America, as well as abroad, to have become once more a fearfully living question. Even by those whose interpretation of this upheaval is less grave, it has still been usual to look upon it as, at best, calling for regrets and apologies. On the contrary, I believe that this strike rightfully interpreted exhibits as much of good as of evil omen.

It will be remembered that the conflict grew out of a dispute between the Pullman Palace Car Company and its employees. Depression in business, continuing from the previous year, severely affected the demand for new cars, which was further diminished by the fact that many railroads had supplied themselves with an unusually large number of cars during the World's Fair season so that few more were needed in 1894. The company attempted to meet this hard season by the double expedient of reducing wages and continuing its work in the shops at a positive loss rather than reduce wages still further, or stop work altogether. The company owned houses at the town of Pullman which it leased to employees. The rents on these houses were not reduced.

Though the company took contracts to build cars for sums

less than the cost of materials and labor employed in the work, this was probably to the advantage of the company as its loss would have been much greater if the works had been closed. The closing of the works would have resulted in leaving the company's houses unoccupied. Both works and houses would have deteriorated and the force of workmen would have been broken up. At the same time, the company's business in owning and operating sleeping-cars continued to be profitable and paid high dividends.

The employees at Pullman struck May 11. Late in June the trouble extended to the railways, through the intervention of the American Railway Union, an organization designed to unite in one body all classes of railway workmen. The Pullman car-shop employees had been made members of this association, and the general organization attempted to help them by demanding that the Pullman Company submit the dispute to arbitration, threatening, if the demand should be rejected, to refuse to haul Pullman cars over the railways on which the members of the union were employed. The company did not consent to arbitration. The railway companies refused to leave off Pullman cars from their trains. Such trains the railway employees refused to operate and their refusal to work affected a large part of the railways from the Mississippi valley to the Pacific. The interruption of traffic was especially felt in the region about Chicago. Supplies were so far cut off that the city was for days threatened with famine; serious inconvenience and privation did, in fact, result. Trains were stopped by mobs and many cars, both empty and loaded, were burned.¹ In and near Chicago, to say nothing of fatalities elsewhere, twelve persons were killed in collisions between mobs and the police or military

¹ Assistant Fire Marshal Fitzgerald reported that in his district (from Thirty-ninth street to Fifty-fifth, from State street west to the city limits) there were burned from July 5 to 9, 147 cars, five switch shanties, six depots, eight switch towers and one hay barn. Assistant Fire Marshal Kenyon, in the district to the south, says that on the 6th, 622 cars were burned on the Pan-Handle tracks in one fire, and 141 cars on the Illinois Central. These were the most serious but by no means the only cases of loss by fire.

forces. The failure of the strikers to gain the support which they asked from other workmen and the intervention of the military—notably the arrival of Federal troops—put an end to the strike.

Much of the horror and dread which these events inspired may possibly be dispelled if one remembers that social disturbances are not necessarily dreadful in proportion to the visible ruin which they bring with them. A double line of freight-cars blazing along a mile of track, betokens a grave relaxation of the power of law, but such a sight is, after all, *prima facie* and of itself, a physical rather than a social phenomenon. It has really no distinct social and political significance until we understand how they came to be burning, how the several classes of the society affected by the occurrence regard it, who approve and who condemn, whether the spirit of lawlessness seems, with the course of years, to affect wider or narrower circles. Let us briefly consider these questions.

The grave apprehensions which the strike awakened were due chiefly to three facts: (1) The destruction of property, especially by fire, after the strike had begun; (2) violence of other kinds which occurred during the strike, such as interference by force with the operation of trains and attacks on persons, either to prevent their working or in revenge; (3) the action of the men in undertaking the strike, lightly sacrificing (it was said) the peace of the community by interrupting traffic to so fearful an extent, and exposing persons and property to the dangers which must attend a strike of that character.

In the first place, the destruction of property may readily be explained without imputing to the laboring population any general disposition to commit lawless acts. The strikers and their friends have constantly asserted that the workmen were not responsible for the wanton destruction of property, which, more than all else, made this strike an occasion for exceptional alarm. The evidence is not conclusive on this point, but tends to justify the assertion of the strikers.

The circumstances of the case were altogether peculiar.

The strike involved an immense extent of railroad tracks in a region convenient to thousands of the most vicious elements of a great city's population. Most of the wanton violence to property was apparently committed by these people, aided by the class, numerous in every community, whose criminal instincts are in ordinary times under the restraint of fear, but who were now encouraged by the feebleness or faithlessness of officers entrusted with the maintenance of law.¹ Abundant evidence to this effect was offered before the Government Strike Commission. A reporter for the *Record* saw a car overturned, but he did not think the men who did this were railroad men. When injunctions were read to the crowd they jeered. Several railroad men told the mob to stop hooting, and they dispersed.² A reporter for the *Herald* said also³ that the people who overturned cars did not look like railroad men. Many of them were women and children. He saw one man, who seemed to be a railroad man, trying to turn the air-cock on an air-brake. A reporter for the *Times*⁴ said he asked the strikers if they were in sympathy with those who were overturning cars. They said no, but that the crowd was so great they could not prevent it. The reporter urged an attempt and the strikers pushed aside the men who were overturning a car, but another crowd at once took hold and overturned it. Most of the men overturning cars were negroes. This reporter saw boys destroying a switch said to have cost \$50,000. They tore off the coverings from the pipes in which the wires were laid and broke the wires. Policemen were standing near and passing constantly, but made no attempt to stop the boys. The reporter thought the boys were acting under the directions of someone, "they were so business-like." They carried away the pieces of the switch to the nearest houses (a few blocks away). The reporter said the cars were burned by boys; he saw no one who seemed to be a

¹ A man who had just come from the scene of disturbance at the Pan-Handle tracks on the night when the greatest destruction of cars took place, told me he had seen a "business man" of his acquaintance assist in overturning a car, seemingly in a spirit of mere wanton destructiveness.

² *Report of the Commission*, p. 362.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 370, 371.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

railroad man making trouble. Some of the rioters at the Stock Yards he knew from their conversation to be butchers. One reporter thought the violence at Blue Island was due to "strikers or sympathizers with them . . . because [a rather questionable reason] nearly all the people down there were railroad employees." He thought that generally the leaders were railroad men, "At least in a great many cases," but he could not give any reason for his opinion.¹ He said reporters were suspected and he "had to keep pretty close to the marshals or deputy sheriffs." Inspector Hunt of the police department said² the leader of a mob killed July 7 was known to the police as a professional thief. Assistant Fire Marshal Fitzgerald said³ that he saw boys setting fire to cars, the oldest about 19 years of age. One railroad man whom he knew assisted the firemen in their work. Several other witnesses told of seeing boys destroying property. This evidence establishes as strongly as any evidence possibly could the claim that (with possible exceptions) the persons who destroyed railroad property were not strikers. It does not, of course, preclude the possibility that the persons destroying the cars were employed by the strikers to do this, but there was at least no evidence of such concealed agency, and it is hard to see what motive could prompt it, as the ruin of property certainly did not aid the cause of the strikers.

In the second place, the stopping of trains by the strikers was reported in the newspapers so frequently and with such particularity that the evidence must be accepted as frequently true, *e. g.*, at Blue Island, according to the *Chicago Herald* on June 30, a striker (whose name is given) pushed the Rock Island yard-master from a switch and derailed a train. The striker was arrested. At Hammond, according to the same newspaper, five or six trains were stopped by members of the American Railway Union and their friends; the leader of the crowd was the head of the local union at Hammond.

There was no lack of instances in which men were assaulted

¹ Page 401.

² Page 388.

³ Page 391.

for taking the place of strikers. The general manager of the Rock Island road testified¹ that more than 500 of the employees of that road were known to have been active in the disturbances. According to General Superintendent Sullivan, of the Illinois Central,² 44 employees of the railways or of the Pullman Company had been arrested, many of them for assault or for interfering with the operation of trains. The testimony of these officers can hardly be regarded as unprejudiced, and the arrests may sometimes have been unjust; yet it can hardly be thought that the statements would be made without some foundation.³ During another strike by the American Railway Union a few weeks earlier, the *Railway Times* (the organ of the American Railway Union) had given approval to such acts by saying: "The *Times* will pass by detailed mention of so-called acts of violence alleged to have been committed; the dumping out and resistance to scabs decorated with the United States Marshal's badge. . . . No reasonable law contemplates (that) the strict observance of its letter can be expected at such times."⁴ The probability of the charge that strikers committed acts of violence is confirmed by the fact that attacks upon persons taking the place of strikers is not at all unusual in strikes. In such a case as the American Railway Union strike, when wide, open spaces, like the yards of railways, make it possible for large crowds to assemble at the place where the disputes center, and when interest is sufficiently general to attract idlers or plunderers, there may possibly be doubt at times whether disorder is due to strikers or to others. But in a strike in a small factory or in the erection of a building, when non-union workmen are

¹*Report of the Strike Commission*, p. 230.

²Page 337.

³It is significant that so far as this testimony goes, no railway or Pullman employees were arrested on charges of breaking into cars or similar acts of plunder or wanton violence. This tends to confirm the statement above, that that class of offenses were not usually committed by strikers. It also tends to show that the arrests were not made arbitrarily. Otherwise, such charges as that of burning cars would probably also have been alleged.

⁴This passage I have not had opportunity to verify. I quote it from a pamphlet on the strike by Mr. E. A. BANCROFT.

attacked day after day on the way to or from work, or when it is necessary for employers to feed and lodge them on the premises, it is reasonably certain that the acts of violence are committed by men immediately concerned in the dispute. So much patience, daring, and ferocity in the pursuit of an enemy implies a deeper interest than that of a mere "sympathizer."

The failure of labor organizations generally to provide for the punishment of members who commit violence toward men taking their places seems to indicate a tolerance of such acts. The propriety of using force in such cases has, moreover, frequently been avowed by representatives of trade unions. Thus a member wrote to the organ of his union in 1892, saying that the switchmen's strike of that year had failed because the militia had been called in "to intimidate their ranks and protect the scabs." An essay by Dyer D. Lum on the "Philosophy of Trade Unions," published by the American Federation of Labor, doubtless truly expresses the sentiment of trade unionists in general with regard to this matter: "In the bitter fight forced upon us . . . pathetic narratives of the suffering of a 'scab' in case he runs against a missile will not trouble our tender hearts." The use of force is not openly counseled, neither is it condemned. The trade union movement partakes essentially of the revolutionary character when "scabs" are to be dealt with. This class of enemies strikes at the very existence of the union and the union, therefore, looks upon them as outlaws.

There seems no doubt that in the Pullman case subordinate officials sometimes participated with men who were not officials in such acts as the stopping of trains, but it is at least impossible to prove beyond mere suspicion the responsibility of the chief officers for the violence in question. The American Railway Union leaders, before the strike, advised their men to avoid striking, and, after the trouble had begun, to avoid violence. If they secretly encouraged violence, evidence to that effect is wanting. A reporter testified before the strike commission¹ that in meetings held to organize branches of the American Railway

¹ Page 209.

Union, the talk was usually against strikes in general, and it was promised that the new organization would prevent them. A reporter for the *Tribune*,¹ evidently not a partisan of the strikers, said: "At almost every meeting I attended, something was said toward discouraging violence." He thought that with some exceptions this was sincere; that the men did not start out with the intention of doing violence, but some of them were willing to commit violence rather than fail.

On June 30, Mr. Debs issued an address "to the railway employees of America," saying, "Let there be no interference with the affairs of the companies involved, and above all, let there be no act of depredation. A man who will destroy property or violate law is an enemy and not a friend of the cause of labor."

Mr. E. A. Bancroft, an attorney for one of the railways, in a pamphlet showing a disposition in general to deal fairly by the strikers attempted to show that the American Railway Union leaders caused their followers to commit violence. In proof of the charge he quotes Debs's telegrams to local officers of the union. These telegrams, however, have in no instance, as it seems to me, clearly justified the charge. The following, it is said, could only refer to violence: "Keep everybody out; marshals cannot fill vacancies." It is not suggested that force be used to "keep everybody out;" that expression might naturally refer only to legitimate persuasion. "Do not interfere with mail trains in any manner."² This suggests that other trains might be interfered with, but the message is quite harmless even with that suggestion if it be understood that other trains might be interfered with by refusing to operate them or by persuading others to refuse.

Another dispatch quoted by Mr. Bancroft, reads: "Baltimore and Ohio officials are trying to intimidate their employees and are also looking for scabs in the eastern states; by all means

¹*Strike Report*, p. 408.

² F. T. McDONALD, president of Local Union No. 306 (p. 117), said that he had always advised the men to pull mail trains but not to pull Pullman cars.

have them shut off." One who strongly expects to find an evil suggestion in this may possibly do so by arbitrarily assuming that to "shut off" the men from the east meant to attack them violently. It is notorious, however, that workmen brought to take the places of strikers have often refused to work on their arrival. To persuade them to do this would surely be to "have them shut off." Another telegram says: "Do not be intimidated by injunctions, deputies, troops or other corporate tools." This means defiance to injunctions, but does not mean violence. So another telegram: "Do not let court orders scare you." "No forcible intervention with mail trains, but any man that handles trains or cars will be scabs." This is the most suspicious looking telegram of the series. One may perhaps conclude that the prohibition upon forcible intervention with mail trains means permission to interfere forcibly with other rains. But it is probably quite as reasonable to think that the man who wrote the telegram with scores of others wrote in a hurry, and did not take sufficient care of implications. "Knock it to them" is simply a slangy exhortation to do one's best in the contest.

Mr. Bancroft quotes the offer by the officers of the union to terminate the strike which they spoke of as "threatening the peace, security and prosperity" of the country, "causing widespread demoralization," etc., and the conclusion is drawn from this that the strike leaders could have stopped the violence if they wished and that they were thus responsible for it. No doubt they could stop the disorder by stopping the strike; that is what the offer asserted. But it does not follow from this that, so long as the strike continued, the officers of the union could have stopped its incidents of disorder. The famous telegram signed with Debs's name, in which some one in the west was advised to "save your money and buy a gun," should have had no suggestion of violence for one at all familiar with the vagaries of American slang. The extreme difficulty of proving that the American Railway Union leaders actively counseled violence is forcibly shown by the fact that their critics are

driven to introduce as evidence telegrams so harmless as this and nearly all of those offered by Mr. Bancroft. If there is any suggestion of violence in them it can be detected only by a painfully literal exegesis, with no allowance for the looseness of hasty composition. Among thousands of telegrams, it is remarkable that nothing more serious could be found.

In all this, however, I have not meant to deny the possibility, or the probability, that the strikers and their leaders may have taken secret satisfaction in the violence which they did not incite, so long as it harassed the railways without injuring the strikers' cause.

The behavior of the strikers with reference to public order may then be summed up thus: The leaders disavowed all violent purpose and *so far as can be proven*, advised against violence; the men generally were not guilty of wantonly destroying property, but were frequently guilty of stopping trains and attacking men who continued to work.

It is important to note these facts, but it is vastly more important to ascertain whether in this instance the tendency to disorder was greater or less than the like tendency at earlier points in the development of the same class of workmen? A growing disposition to violate the safety of persons and property would justify all those frantic expressions of alarm which this strike did in fact call forth; but a merely transitory and visibly diminishing spirit of disturbance is damaging precisely to the degree of its immediate effects; it casts no dark shadow before it and may cause regret but cannot reasonably be regarded with terror.

It is, however, difficult to contrast the strike of 1894 with earlier upheavals of the same general character by men in the same employment. A perfectly significant comparison could be made only in case the earlier and the later strike were found to have taken place under essentially identical circumstances. This means that the actors must represent the same class of workmen and the same geographical section (for the working population differs widely in one region from another); there must be

somewhat the same degree of provocation; and the power and willingness of public authorities to control disorder must be about equal in the two instances. Of the earlier railway strikes which best fulfill these conditions I have been unable to find sufficient detailed accounts which are at the same time trustworthy, and it has been necessary therefore to make a comparison with a case which serves this purpose somewhat imperfectly.

In 1886 the Missouri Pacific and other southwestern railways were the scene of a disturbance which in its general character much resembled the strike of 1894. The earlier strike was carried on by the Knights of Labor—an organization designed like the American Railway Union to include workmen of many classes in contrast with the strictly “trade” unions. In each case the great majority of strikers were railway employees in the lower ranks, such as brakemen and switchmen. A larger number of engineers were probably to be found among the strikers of 1886.

The contrast between the two strikes appears first in the attitude of the principal leaders. The President of the American Railway Union has not been shown to have advised violence, or at most to have given it more than a tacit sanction. Martin Irons, the leader in the strike in the southwest, at a meeting in St. Louis, advised the strike committee to call on the men who were at work and persuade them to quit; if they would not, to “give them pills. You know what kind of pills I mean.”¹ In the American Railway Union strike the leaders of inferior rank also refrained in nearly all cases, so far as I have been able to learn, from counseling violence. In the strike of 1886, the leaders in a majority of cases deprecated violence and lawlessness², but some of them did not hesitate to avow even to state officers a purpose of gaining their ends by force if need be.

¹ Testimony before Committee on the Existing Labor Troubles, *House Report 417*, XLIX. Congress, second session, p. 541.

² *Ibid.*, p. 16. Also a reporter for the *Times* testified before the Commission in 1894 that he never saw a strike in which the leaders so universally advised peaceful methods. In many other strikes which he had seen, it was said that violence would be used if other methods did not avail.

Adjutant General Campbell of Kansas went to Parsons when trains had been stopped by strikers at that point. He was told by the leader of the Knights of Labor, during a consultation with the strikers committee at their room that "they had made up their minds that freight trains should not run there if they could help it." Campbell asked them who was responsible for the violence (including the wrecking of a train). He said: "You deny as a committee any responsibility and yet as individuals you are engaged in it. That," says Mr. Campbell in his testimony before the House of Representatives Committee, "was what they seemed to want to impress on my mind." Campbell told the men that resistance to the movement of the trains would be rebellion. Buchanan, the leader of the Knights of Labor, said they were entitled to the rights of belligerents; "he (Buchanan) said it was revolution, and proceeded to argue the question with me, and Mr. Buchanan went so far as to bring his dictionary to show me the distinction between revolution and rebellion."¹ Campbell said that he believed the committee as a committee was directing the whole affair "from the fact that the committee would meet, and then they would meet the assembly, and then a certain line of conduct would follow."

The strikers of 1886, generally in contrast with the American Railway Union strikers, made no serious attempt to conceal the fact that the interference with trains took place by the act of their own men. In at least two instances the Knights of Labor ran directly from their halls to stop approaching trains.²

Violence of a bold kind or violence involving great danger to life was much more frequent in the earlier case. As there is no complete enumeration of such acts in either case, it is difficult to make an accurate comparison, but one who reads a narrative of each cannot fail to see that in the earlier instance violations of law were bolder and assaults upon persons more ferocious.

¹ Page 120.

² See Testimony of Adjutant General Campbell mentioned above. At Pacific, Mo., the Knights of Labor rushed from the hall and engaged in a battle with the men on the train, both sides using fire-arms (*loc. cit.*, p. 388).

In 1886 men refusing to quit work were attacked in their boarding houses, or attempts were made to burn their homes with their families. In 1894 men were attacked by stealth and personal violence, and attempts to derail trains were less frequent than in 1886.

This comparison is somewhat unsatisfactory because the center of disturbance in the latter case was in Chicago, while many of the events of chief significance in the earlier strike took place at small towns or railway stations of Missouri where it might be supposed that the public interest would be asserted less strongly than in the city of Chicago. It has also sometimes been said that the railway workmen in that district were at that time of an exceptionally turbulent character. These facts are, however, partly, at least, offset by certain further facts. The government of Chicago was at that time in the hands of a chief executive who had shown an utter lack of courage and force in dealing with labor disturbances in Chicago, while policemen very generally sympathized with the disorderly elements and frequently failed to suppress disorder. The area of the American Railway Union strike also included that of the southwestern strike, yet, even for the coincident territory, it appears that there was less disorder in 1894. Finally, violence toward persons was more general and open in St. Louis in 1886 than in Chicago in 1894, and the circumstances attending the events in these two cities may probably be regarded as approximately similar.

It thus appears that the immense loss of property which distinguished the Pullman strike from other similar disturbances was due to accidental circumstances, not to any growing recklessness on the part of the workmen, and that the readiness to violate law by interference with the operation of trains or by violence to persons had probably diminished within a few years.

It has already been remarked that in one respect, which has not been considered in this comparison, the public peace was seriously disturbed by the uprising of the American Railway Union. With a view to redress a wrong which it was thought

had been suffered by a relatively small number of persons, the convenience of the general public was seriously interrupted. The railroad companies, which were in no way responsible for the action of the Pullman Company, were ordered under threat by the employees to enter the dispute and compel Pullman to submit, though they were bound by contract to continue their service to the Pullman Company. The railroad workmen entered upon this grave undertaking in a somewhat tumultuous manner, sometimes voting to strike in meetings composed largely of persons in various occupations, not members of the American Railway Union or any other railway organization, and having no direct interest in the dispute.¹ The chances of success were infinitesimal. It is pretty generally recognized that a strike is most likely to succeed when it is confined to relatively few workmen, the others remaining at work and contributing to the support of the strikers; but in this strike a large number of powerful railways were attacked simultaneously by a new organization which had not had time to accumulate a large strike fund, and the impossibility of defeating the railways was made yet more evidently hopeless by the terms which it was meant to impose upon the railroad companies. They were expected, not to grant concessions to their own workmen, as in ordinary strikes, but to engage in a dispute with which they were not concerned, to go to war like a band of mercenaries without even the Lanzknecht's hope of pay or plunder, at the command of their own employees, against the party with whom they strongly sympathized. Such a command, it might have been supposed, they would resist with the most desperate obstinacy. Finally the attack on the companies hauling Pullman cars must be expected to interfere seriously with the convenience of the public; the strike rapidly became a general

¹General Manager St. John (p. 214) gave a list of twenty-three persons who he said were present at the meeting in which the Rock Island employees at Blue Island struck. Other witnesses before the strike commission gave similar testimony. Mr. Debs's statement that all meetings of the organization during the strike were public lends an appearance of probability to the statement. The charge that the strike was undertaken by persons not directly concerned was made as a matter of common notoriety by intelligent members of trade unions with whom I have talked.

attack on the railway companies, involving not merely Pullman cars but trains of all sorts on the roads affected. The injury to the public was no less than appalling. It was the purpose of the strikers before the close of the conflict to compel the intervention of the public for bringing the companies to the employees' terms by shutting off completely the railway communications of Chicago with the outer world. Mr. Debs, in his testimony before the strike commission, said that the Illinois Central, the Rock Island, and other roads were "practically paralyzed." A telegram sent out from the office of the American Railway Union, July 2, gave the cheerful assurance "if strike not settled in forty-eight hours, complete paralysis will follow. Potatoes and ice out of sight."

Few chapters of history are more horrible than those which describe the sufferings from famine in beleaguered cities. So far as the strikers succeeded in their effort to "paralyze" the railroads, the city of Chicago approached that unhappy condition. This city was dependent upon its railway communications, not only for "potatoes and ice," but also for milk and provisions of all sorts, and interference with traffic meant famine. The American Railway Union ventured to inflict this fearful chastisement upon the community in order to compel the railroads, under the pressure of their own losses and the pressure of the public's sufferings, to become in effect the allies of the strikers against the Pullman Company. In judging this policy, the public were divided between two contrary opinions. Many excellent persons justified the strikers. It was believed by these persons that the principle for which the strikers contended was clearly right; that workmen ought to be allowed a claim to good wages in hard times even if the employer has to pay them out of his income from enterprises other than those in which the particular workmen are engaged. The establishment of such a principle, it was thought, could be hoped for not through the ordinary processes of formal legislation, while its urgency was so great as to justify the great temporary sacrifice of the public comfort by which alone its recognition could be extorted. Mr.

Debs said that the public might properly be subjected to inconvenience to save the workmen from slavery.

Opposed to this was the much more prevalent opinion that the original dispute had ceased to be the real issue. "Very possibly," it was said, "the Pullman management had been more tight-fisted than their financial condition required or considerations of generosity allowed. Let this be admitted. Let it be admitted also, for argument, that, as a universal principle, an employing corporation ought not to refuse good wages so long as it can pay high dividends. The approval of such a principle and its enforcement is a matter for the whole people, acting through formal legislation. The decision as to such an immense innovation cannot be intrusted to any little group of volunteer lawgivers, having no credentials but their zeal as reformers, and enforcing their zeal upon an unwilling public by involving the whole community, together with the special object of their condemnation, in a sort of wholesale lynching."

We need not, in this paper, attempt to prove that one or the other of these opinions was sound. We are concerned with the whole matter only as it serves to indicate the degree of revolutionary spirit among the trade unions of the country. This it does with some exactness, and quite decidedly. To say in general terms that a certain body of men are or are not properly law-abiding is to characterize them very vaguely; but, to show that under known conditions to temptation they behave in a particular way, is to express their disposition most definitely. On the one hand, the belief that the workmen at Pullman had been oppressed, and the desire to redress their grievances were almost, if not quite, universal throughout the body of trade unionists. On the other hand, it was evident that the undertaking in which the American Railway Union called upon other workmen to join was an exceptionally bold venture, and menaced in an exceptional degree the good order of the community.

The decision to support or not to support the strike as it progressed was for each trade unionist a choice between class feeling and regard for the general public interest. The emergency,

therefore, tested decisively their readiness to plunge into war under the impulse of class feeling. The decision showed a division among the organized workmen of the country. Their action made evident, however, two facts of the utmost significance: (1) that the main body of the trade unions of the country, the oldest, strongest, and most truly representative organizations, were not thus ready to sacrifice the peace of the community. It appeared (2) that this spirit of caution was strengthened in two ways by the fact of organization, as the official leaders of the unions were more cautious than their followers; and as the standing rules of the union were of great assistance to the officers in their efforts to restrain the men. It is probable that the disturbance would have been much more widespread and disastrous if workmen had not been restrained by the good sense of their best men and by their own constitutions.

The strike was opposed throughout by the old railway "brotherhoods." Mr. Sovereign, the chief official of the Knights of Labor, in testifying before the Strike Commission (page 76), spoke of all the "old-time organizations" as opposed to the American Railway Union in their strike. Likewise Vice President Howard, of the American Railway Union, says (page 29) the convention of that union on June 12 instructed the officers to call the leaders of other organizations to a conference (Gompers, McBryde and McBride of the miners, Sovereign, etc.) "more to place each of them on record than anything else, because we knew that some of them would not attend any conference with us. . . . At the convention on the twelfth of June," he continues, "this matter was brought up. I know there was a good deal of comment made that Mr. Arthur would not attend any kind of a conference; that Mr. Sargent would not; that Mr. Clark, of the Order of Railway Conductors, would not; and Mr. Barrett had already expressed himself by writing a letter to the general managers condemning the action of our union as being detrimental to his organization." Mr. Clark, of the Order of Railway Conductors, testified that Debs asked the aid of his

organization in the strike. He answered that he had neither authority nor inclination to give aid (page 186). But the answer, he explained, was not based on an opinion as to the merit of the strike at Pullman. "I did not think," he said, "that whatever the conditions at Pullman were, that it was right to precipitate a strike on all railroad companies who had no more to do with Pullman than they had to do with any other house or firm with whom they might contract." P. H. Morrissey, of the Brotherhood of Trainmen, said the other organizations sympathized with the original strike at Pullman, but not with the general strike that grew out of it. Hence their refusal. It was the practice of the trainmen, he said, never to strike except to redress grievances of their own members. Grand Master H. E. Wilkinson, of the Brotherhood of Trainmen, July 3, gave out a statement that the American Railway Union strike was authorized by about two hundred delegates, "who did not represent one thirtieth of the employees in train service in the United States, but every man, woman, and child employed in any capacity on a railway is expected to bow to this imperious command regardless of any rights of their own, obligations to other organizations, or contracts with their employers." The *Journal* of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers said that that organization could not give the American Railway Union the aid it asked without violating its contract with the railways, against whom it had no grievance. Further, the officers of the old brotherhoods had no authority to assist the American Railway Union strike. Debs said, in a manifesto sent out from Woodstock, that the old brotherhoods "were the active allies of the railroads in the great strike." An editor of one of the old railway orders said in reply, that the old organizations had signed contracts requiring conference and due notice for their abrogation; it would have been a gross violation of honor to sever the contracts otherwise. Some years before, Debs had spoken of certain strikers as "forming themselves into a mob" and burning and plundering the property of the corporations. The locomotive engineers' *Journal* says the old

organizations were merely trying to keep the members from becoming disorganized and "forming themselves into a mob."

The American Federation of Labor includes so large a part of the vigorous trade unions of the country that its action with reference to the strike may fairly be taken as representative.¹ It was the influence of the federation that finally led to the formal discontinuance of the strike.

People who were then in Chicago will have no difficulty in recalling the intense excitement prevailing for days, during which there were incessant rumors of a general strike throughout the city, of plots to burn and plunder the city, or of a general uprising of the laboring population in all the great industrial centers. The dread of destructive violence was stimulated by a great conflagration of uncertain origin at the World's Fair grounds, and the "universal strike" began to seem possible when several organizations, not at all concerned in the Pullman strike, left their work "in sympathy." Mr. Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, testified before the United States Commission that he had received telegrams from various places throughout Missouri, Ohio, and Colorado, saying that unions were waiting the word which the American Federation of Labor would give them as to striking or remaining at work. Newspaper reports of the time confirm this statement. A telegram from the St. Louis Allied Trades to the Chicago Trade and Labor Assembly expressed a willingness for a general strike. The Chicago assembly answered: "Glory in the position you have taken, and ask that you hold your men in position to aid at any time." Mr. Deb's invitation to a conference of labor leaders was ignored by most of those to whom it was sent. President Gompers, of the federation, according to Deb's statement, "wrote, in substance, that he was with us in sympathy, but he could not possibly come to Chicago at that time."² Members of unions affiliated with the federation passed resolutions insisting that Gompers must come, and he consented, reluctantly it

¹ The railway brotherhoods just referred to did not belong to this federation.

² Debs's testimony before the Strike Commission, p. 154 of the *Report*.

seems, to come to Chicago to confer with the chief officers of the American Federation of Labor. Mr. Debs, according to his own statement,¹ said to him: "If I were you I would muster all the forces of labor in peaceable effort to secure a satisfactory adjustment of our grievances even if we had to involve all the industries of the country." The next day, he says, Gompers told him that the conference of leaders of the American Federation of Labor "was wholly in sympathy with the American Railway Union, believing it was right in its struggles, but had reached the conclusion, after long and serious deliberation, that it was not advisable at this time to take an active part in the trouble," though they had voted \$500 for the defense of Debs and his companions in the courts. The conference issued an address to the unions in the American Federation of Labor, advising them not to strike: "In making this declaration," it was said, "we do not wish it understood that we are in any way antagonistic to labor organizations now struggling for right or justice, but rather to the fact that the present contest had become of such a character that they could not advise action likely to result in further confusion." Newspapers, it was claimed, had maliciously represented matters so that in the public mind the working classes are now arrayed against federal authority. "This is a position we do not wish to be placed in nor will we occupy without a protest." Certain corporations were charged with assuming that they stand for law and order, and that those opposed to them represent lawlessness, although for years the railroads had "shown the lawless example of defiance to injunctions and have set aside laws to control them. . . . In this disregard of law these corporations have given the greatest impetus to anarchy. Still they did not hesitate, when confronted by outraged labor, to invoke the power of the state." Against this power, the address continued, it would not be well to contend by striking. Better "organize more closely, educate and prepare ourselves, and by the ballot redeem ourselves from industrial misrule."

¹ P. 155 of *Strike Commission's Report*.

The strike had proven futile; Debs realized this, but, as one of those present at the conference expressed it in private conversation, his "ghost dancers" would not listen. This same man claimed for the council of the federation the credit of bringing the American Railway Union officers to reason. There is no doubt whatever that their influence was used to this end, and it seems probable that it was effective in some degree toward terminating the disturbance, whereas, if exerted in a contrary direction, this influence might greatly have prolonged and extended the trouble. The officers of the federation usually maintained in their published utterances an attitude of ostensible friendliness toward a "noble cause," and its heroic leaders.¹ But (especially in private conversation) some of them, at any rate, have been known to utter curses upon Debs as ferocious as the general managers of the railways could possibly desire. I have also heard one of the men at this conference say that President Cleveland's interference by sending troops had a good effect, though he thought its constitutionality was doubtful, and he felt inclined to resent the act because he thought it showed a subserviency toward the corporations, as like assistance would not have been rendered to workmen. But, he added, he could not talk in this way before a trade union audience; they would say: "that ———— said Cleveland was right."

The opposition to the American Railway Union was due in part, no doubt, to the fact that it was a rival organization, representing the discredited principle of trade amalgamation (in contrast with separation of trades), and it would be difficult to prove that this was not, rather than a love for law and order, the essential motive of opposition to the strike. But we are not

¹A typical comment on the American Railway Union strike is found in the report of the president of the Boiler Makers and Iron-Shipbuilders at their convention in June 1896: "Many of our numbers were induced through sympathy to co-operate with and take part in a struggle that, while in every way deserving in its own sphere, yet appealed too keenly and unduly to the sympathy of our members, and who, I regret to say, were imposed upon by false promises made brilliant by designing men, and only to be broken to the detriment of our members, who were forced to sacrifice everything for the cause they had so nobly, though erringly, espoused."

altogether concerned here with motives. The question is partly one of purely external fact. The labor organizations of the country have frequently been held as a class responsible for the American Railway Union strike, and the spirit of recklessness which that strike exhibited has hastily been thought characteristic of the American labor movement as a whole. This charge will have been refuted if it is shown that, from whatever motives, the prevailing majority of trade unionists (perhaps not a numerical, but an effective majority, notably the officers) opposed, and probably to some extent shortened, a disturbance undertaken by a discredited minority.

The history of the "railway war" of 1894 thus justifies the following conclusions:

1. Of the disorders attending the strike, those which contributed most to make it dreadful, were not the work of the strikers, who have generally been held responsible for these acts. The railway workmen are not losing, and are probably gaining respect for law and for the security of persons and property.

2. The influence of the official leaders in this strike was a restraining influence. The officers of the American Railway Union tried in vain to dissuade their followers from striking, and the officials of other organizations endeavored successfully to keep the strike from spreading. The labor organizations of the country, as a whole, showed that they are not wanting in a regard for the public welfare, that the idea of a "general strike" does not appeal to them, and that, however strongly they may be convinced that individuals in their own ranks are oppressed, they are not as a whole so blinded by class feeling as to attempt to redress these grievances by throwing the affairs of the whole community into chaos.

For these reasons, it was said above that the great strike of 1894 is an occasion, on the whole, for encouragement, not for the alarm with which it has commonly been regarded.

A. P. WINSTON.